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Police officers murdered in the line of duty, 1961 to 2009

by Sara Dunn

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Symbols page

. not available for any reference period

.. not available for a specific reference period

... not applicable

0 true zero or a value rounded to zero

0^s value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded

^{p} preliminary

^{r} revised

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*

^{E} use with caution

F too unreliable to be published

Police officers murdered in the line of duty, 1961 to 2009: Highlights

- Since 1961, Canada has seen 133 police officers murdered in the line of duty, all but four of whom were men.
- Homicides against police officers occurred most often during a robbery investigation, accounting for almost one-quarter of all killings.
- Nine in ten police officers were shot to death, most of whom were not wearing a protective vest.
- All but five homicides against police officers since 1961 have been solved.

Police officers murdered in the line of duty, 1961 to 2009

By Sara Dunn

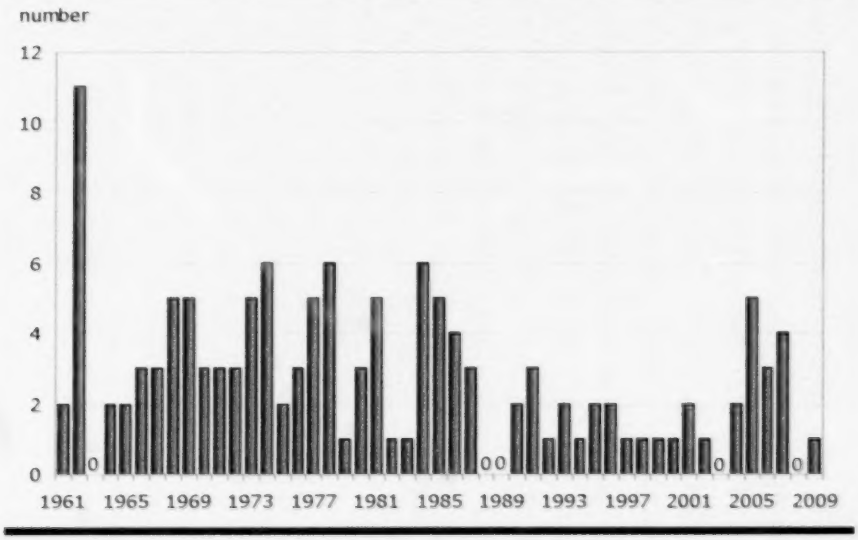
Policing, by its very nature, is a high-risk occupation. One of the dangers associated with being a police officer[1] in Canada is homicide. The only other profession more at risk of on-the-job homicide is that of taxi drivers with a rate about twice that of police officers.[2]

Drawing on data from the Homicide Survey, this article presents information on police officers who were murdered in the line of duty since 1961. It does not include police officers who were killed as a result of other causes, such as traffic accidents.

Between 1961 and 2009, 133 police officers were murdered in the line of duty–including eight double, one triple and one quadruple-slaying. Most of these deaths (65%) occurred in the first half of this time period, between 1961 and 1984 (Chart 1).

Homicides against police officers have occurred in every province and territory with the exception of Prince Edward Island and Yukon (Table 1).

Chart 1
Homicides against police officers, Canada, 1961 to 2009



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey.

1. Police officers include those persons employed for the preservation and maintenance of the public peace or for the service or execution of civil process. This category does not include correctional officers or private security personnel.

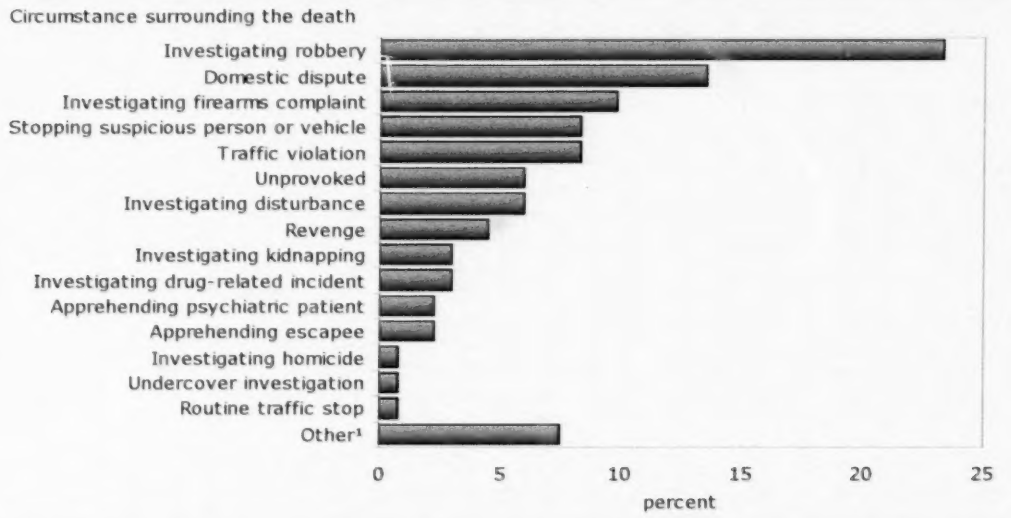
2. Based upon data beginning in 1991 when estimates of population data by occupation became available from the Census. Excludes "occupations" that involve illegal activities (for example, prostitutes, gang members and drug dealers).

Robbery investigations most dangerous for police

There are some situations faced by police officers in which the risk of being murdered is higher than others. For example, since 1961, police officers were most often murdered during a robbery investigation, accounting for nearly one-quarter (23%) of all killings (Chart 2). Another 14% of police officers were murdered while responding to a domestic dispute, although most of these homicides occurred during the 1960s and 1970s. In more recent years, stopping a suspicious vehicle/person and stopping a vehicle for a traffic violation have resulted in more homicides against police officers than responding to domestic disputes.

There has been some debate within the policing community surrounding the issue of one-person versus two-person vehicle patrols. Of those officers killed while on vehicle patrol, 54% were assigned to two-officer vehicles and 46% to one-officer vehicles.

Chart 2
Homicides against police officers, by type of circumstance, Canada, 1961 to 2009



1. Includes all other situations not otherwise stated. For example, riot control, suicide situations, investigations of criminal incidents not listed above.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey.

One-third of murdered officers relatively new to their service

Between 1961 and 2009 all but four police officer homicides were against males, many of whom were relatively new to their present police service. On average, murdered police officers were 34 years old at the time of their death and had been with their present police service for less than 5 years.

Similar to homicides in general, the vast majority (95%) of those accused of killing a police officer were male, averaging about 30 years of age. Of the 170 people accused of homicide against a police officer since 1961, nine were female and three were youth (12 to 17 years). Unlike overall homicides, those against police officers were more than twice as likely to involve multiple accused persons (30% versus 12%).

Police officers most commonly murdered with a firearm

Police officers killed in the line of duty were almost invariably shot to death. Between 1961 and 2009, 92% of all officer-related killings were committed with a firearm. Of these, rifles or shotguns (including sawed-off) accounted for 56% of deaths while handguns were used in 44% of these killings. Nearly 8 in 10 officers were not wearing protective body armour (such as vests) at the time of the shooting, although this was more commonly the case in the 1960s and 1970s.

Most police officers did not have an opportunity to defend themselves—about one-third of officers drew or fired their weapon before being killed.

Most homicides against police officers are solved

In general, most homicides are solved but this is particularly the case when the victim is a police officer. Of all homicides against police officers since 1961, 96%, or all but five killings, have resulted in an accused person being identified. In comparison, 84% of homicides in general have been solved over this same period.

Detailed data table

Table 1
Homicides against police officers by province and territory, 1961 to 2009

Province and territory	number	rate[1]
Newfoundland and Labrador	1	2.6
Prince Edward Island	0	0.0
Nova Scotia	2	3.0
New Brunswick	5	9.2
Quebec	41	6.3
Ontario	44	4.9
Manitoba	6	6.2
Saskatchewan	7	8.0
Alberta	14	7.3
British Columbia	10	3.8
Yukon	0	0.0
Northwest Territories	1	15.6
Nunavut	2	54.3
Canada	**133**	**5.6**

1. Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 actively employed police officers. Population estimates for police officers are from the Police Administration Survey. Due to the unavailability of population data for 1961, the rate of homicides against police officers for that year is based upon estimates for 1962.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey.